

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections**1. Name**

historic Plymouth Church

and/or common Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims

2. Location

street & number 57 Orange Street not for publication

city, town Brooklyn vicinity of

state New York code county code

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims

street & number 75 Hicks Street

city, town Brooklyn vicinity of state New York

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Kings County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Brooklyn state New York

6. Representation in Existing Surveys1) Historic American Buildings Survey
title 2) Historic Sites Survey has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☐ nodate 1) 1934 2) 1961 ☒ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records National Park Service

city, town Washington state DC

7. Description

Condition

☐ excellent
☒ good
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated
☐ ruins
☐ unexposed

Check one

☒ unaltered
☐ altered

Check one

☒ original site
☐ moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The present building of Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims was erected in 1849, with the first service held on the first Sunday in January 1850. It replaced the congregation's earlier meeting house, purchased in 1847, which had burned in 1849. The new sanctuary faced Orange Street; an adjoining lecture hall and Sunday School were built on the original church site on Cranberry Street, where Hillis Hall now stands. Sherman Day, chairman of the building committee, drew a rough design for the church, which was finished by J. C. Wells, an English architect.

The church is a plain rectangular building of red brick, with its gable end facing the street; the gable is given pedimental form by a brownstone belt course. The front elevation is divided into three sections by blind segmental arches. The central bay of this tripartite composition is wider than the flanking bays and is emphasized by a one-story vernacular Doric portico with four wooden columns and an entablature. The portico leads to three double-leafed doors, above which are three long gallery windows. Above these windows, the arch of the recess breaks the pediment, and contains three small rectangular windows lighting an upper gallery, and a brownstone plaque marked "Plymouth Church 1849." Each end bay contains a single small window on the ground floor and a longer gallery window above. All the windows are capped by flush peaked lintels. The five windows on each of the side elevations are arranged in a similar manner, but have flat lintels.

The windows were originally clear, multipaned double-hung sash. In 1907-09, these were replaced with stained glass. Planned by Pastor Newell Dwight Hillis, designed by Frederick Stymetz Lamb, and executed by J. & R. Lamb of New York, the windows illustrate the "History of Puritanism and its Influence Upon the Institutions and People of the Republic," focusing on scenes of political and religious liberty.

Entrance to the church is through a shallow vestibule, behind which is a nearly square auditorium, with a continuous gallery on three sides. The gallery terminates at the north ends in convex curves, between which the choir loft continues across the north wall. There is a small upper gallery along the south (Orange Street) wall. The gallery is carried on slender cast-iron columns with alternating Corinthian and Egyptian capitals. At the street level the front pews are curved, forming a semi-circle around the raised rostrum. The pews in the four corners of the gallery are also curved. The pew occupied by Abraham Lincoln on the day before his Cooper Union Address is marked by a silver plaque.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below							
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion				
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science				
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture				
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/				
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater				
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation				
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)				

Specific dates 1849

Builder/Architect Sherman Day/J.C. Wells

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Plymouth Church was a foremost center of anti-slavery sentiment between 1847 and the outbreak of the Civil War. Its minister during this period was Henry Ward Beecher. From its pulpit spoke such notable opponents of slavery as William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, Charles Sumner and John Greenleaf Whittier. Although the role of the church and its preacher in the abolitionist movement are its most important area of significance, the church under Beecher's leadership was also an early proponent of such ideas as women's suffrage and the theory of evolution. Architecturally, the simple design of the church extends the Puritan ethic of plain living and high thinking into the mid-19th century.

The Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims, founded in 1847, was a major center for the abolitionist movement in the United States between its founding year and the outbreak of the Civil War. The congregation was established in 1847 as Brooklyn's second Congregational Church, under the corporate name of Plymouth Church. It called as minister Henry Ward Beecher, who had already gained wide notice through his writings and skill at preaching. Beecher, born in 1813, was then serving a congregation in Indiana. He was the son of Lyman Beecher, a well-known clergyman of liberal views, and brother of the novelist Harriet Beecher Stowe, best known as the author of Uncle Tom's Cabin.

On Sunday, October 10, 1847, Beecher preached his first sermon at Plymouth Church. Less than two years later the church building burned. By January 1850 a new and larger church was ready for occupancy, with an auditorium designed especially for Beecher's preaching. Thereafter, his weekly congregation averaged about 2,500 people. Visitors from all over the country and from abroad came to Brooklyn to hear him. His sermons were printed in pamphlet form and widely circulated. Beecher also became a highly popular figure on the lecture circuit. His 1863 visit to England is credited with contributing to a more sympathetic view of the Union cause in that country.

In the slavery controversy, Beecher was not as extreme an abolitionist as William Lloyd Garrison. Beecher saw slavery as doomed by the workings of the natural laws of God, and urged that it be left alone to die where it

(See continuation sheet 8-1)

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet 9-1

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property .8

Quadrangle name Brooklyn

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A 1 8 5 8 5 0 3 0 4 5 0 5 6 5 0
Zone Easting Northing

B
Zone Easting Northing

C

D

E

F

G

H

Verbal boundary description and justification

See continuation sheet 10-1

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susanne Hand and Constance Greiff, architectural historians

organization Heritage Studies, Inc.

date December 20, 1984

street & number Box 864, Mapleton Road

telephone (609)452-1754

city or town Princeton

state New Jersey 08540

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☐ national ☐ state ☐ local

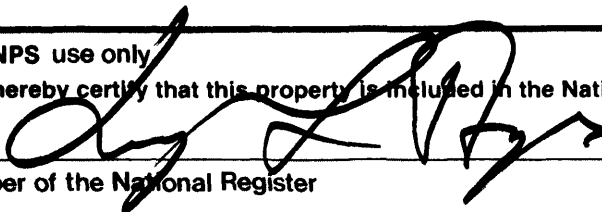
As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title _____ date _____

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register



date

6/26/85

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

Ahlstrom, Sydney E., A Religious History of the American People (New York and London, 1979).

Cochran, Warren B., ed., A Church in History: The Story of Plymouth's First Hundred Years . . . (Brooklyn, 1949).

Douglas, Ann, The Feminization of American Culture (New York, 1977).

Hibben, Paxton, Henry Ward Beecher, an American Portrait (New York, 1927).

"Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims: Some Notes for Visitors," pamphlet distributed by the church.

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BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION AND JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries are those of the complex owned by Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims, comprising Block 221, Lot 1 (Church House, Gymnasium, Arcade and Garden) and Block 221, Lot 13 (Plymouth Church Sanctuary, Hillis House, and vacant lot) in the Borough of Brooklyn, Kings County, New York. Although the Plymouth Church Sanctuary is the only building on the site associated with the theme and period of significance, all the buildings are interconnected and attached. These interconnections are in part defined by the open spaces between the buildings. The boundary was therefore drawn to include the entire site owned by the congregation.

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The sanctuary retains its original character despite alterations. A pulpit has been added to the raised platform where Henry Ward Beecher preached. The choir loft and organ above have also been altered. The walnut organ case was built in 1855 to house what was then the largest organ in the United States. The organ has been rebuilt five times and moved back against the wall to allow for enlargement of the choir space. Simple paneling has been added to the originally plain walls. The 1920 fire that gutted Hillis Hall only slightly affected the sanctuary requiring restoration or replacement of some of the stained glass windows. The designer/contractor who did the initial work in 1907/09 was contracted to do the 1920 restoration using the original plans, and the restoration reflected the original style and design of the windows in all aspects. The entire interior was renovated in 1959 with new rugs, pew cushions, and lighting. In 1984 the interior was replastered and repainted, the windows were cleaned and repaired, and protective laminated glass installed.

To the east of the church is a narrow, residential-sized lot with a mid-nineteenth century fence. The lot extends to Cranberry Street as a narrow alley along the side of Hillis Hall.

In 1913 the Church House and Gymnasium was built at the corner of Hicks and Orange Streets. Given by John Arbuckle, a sugar and coffee magnate, it was originally known as the Arbuckle Institute, and served as a church-affiliated settlement house. The Church House is a 3 1/2 story, 7 bay Georgian Revival brick building with Beaux Arts detailing. A one-story Georgian Revival structure, known as the Arcade and also built in 1913, connects the Church House to the Church and Hillis Hall. A garden in front of the Arcade completes the ensemble.

The garden elevation of the Church House is dominated by a central stone frontispiece, with a round-arched doorway flanked by engaged Doric columns on the first story, and colossal Corinthian columns and pediment above. The columns enframe a tripartite window in the second story and a Palladian window in the third. The windows across the end bays decrease in size from the first to third stories. At the first and second stories the windows have 15/15 sash surmounted by stone lintels with mock keystones and incised corner blocks. The 10/10 third story windows are topped by flat brick arches and stone keystones and are set between a stone belt course and a deep dentil and modillion cornice. The deck on hip roof is pierced by segmental-arched dormers. The protruding bay at the southeast, although in the same style, has an undetailed cornice and appears to be an addition.

(See continuation sheet 7-2)

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The Hicks Street elevation, set on a high stone basement, is similar in design, but has a less elaborate entrance bay, featuring a round-arched doorway enframed by simple Doric pilasters and entablature. Tripartite windows above light a stairhall, above which is a lunette set within the broken pediment.

The 3-bay Orange Street elevation of the Church House features a decorative 2-story stone central bay with an aedicule, above which is a shallow niche. This feature incorporates columns, a broken pediment, cartouche, garlands, acanthus leaves, and a datestone inscribed 1913.

Used today for meeting rooms, offices, and classrooms, the Church House interior retains much of its original form and detailing, including paneling, pilasters, cornices, and fireplaces.

A wrought-iron fence extends from the Church House across the garden to the sanctuary. Two gates flanked by brick pillars lead to brick walkways through the garden to the Church House and Arcade.

The Arcade is a symmetrical 1-story brick building divided into bays by pilasters enframing two entrances, round-arched casement windows and blind arches. A Doric entablature extends across the eaves line with a stone balustrade above. At the center of the building a bronze statue of Henry Ward Beecher occupies a Doric aedicule of stone. To the left of this feature a bronze relief of Abraham Lincoln is set into one of the blind arches. Both are the work of Gutzon Borglum, sculptor of the heroic Presidential heads on Mount Rushmore.

The interior of the Arcade serves as an interior passageway between the buildings in the complex, and also as a gallery. Displayed are portraits of former ministers and a piece of Plymouth Rock. The most historically significant painting is a portrait of Henry Ward Beecher with "Pinky," a slave girl auctioned for her freedom at the church in 1860.

Along Hicks Street, the Gymnasium, although built as part of the Arbuckle Institute, is articulated as a separate building from the Church House. Like the latter, it is constructed of brick and stone, but is only 2 stories high. Its main decorative feature is a large Palladian window in the second story.

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Between the Gymnasium and Hillis Hall, at the corner of Hicks and Cranberry Streets, is a playground enclosed by a chain link fence. Featuring modern playground equipment, it is a non-contributing part of the historic complex.

Hillis Hall fronts on Cranberry Street, and is attached to the church at its rear. It occupies the site of the original meetinghouse, and the later lecture hall and Sunday School. Gutted by fire in 1920, it was reopened in 1954. It contains a large meeting space/dining room, kitchen and chapel. The stained glass windows come from the Church of the Pilgrims, which merged with Plymouth Church in 1934. Their installation has created an irregular facade, of no particular stylistic derivation, with stained glass windows of various shapes and sizes, altered brickwork, and a central entrance bay without an entrance.

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already existed. However, Beecher advocated resistance to the extension of slavery. He urged Northerners to emigrate to Kansas and to use force to make it free soil. When an anti-slavery group left New England to fight to keep Kansas a free state, Beecher pledged his church to send twenty-five rifles. They were shipped in a box marked Bibles, and thereafter rifles supplied to free soil settlers were often called Beecher's Bibles.

Beecher also opposed the compromise measures of 1850 on the grounds that liberty and slavery were irreconcilable elements in our political system. He counseled disobedience to the Fugitive Slave Law, declaring that the requirements of humanity were above those of the Constitution and encouraged his own congregation to become operators in the Underground Railroad. He made his pulpit available to more vehement and radical opponents of slavery. Several times, to dramatize the grimmest aspect of slavery, the sale of human flesh, he auctioned off slaves from the pulpit to secure their freedom. The most famous of these was a ten-year old girl named Pinky. Beecher brought her into church in February 1860, and told the congregation that her master had agreed to sell her into freedom for \$900.00.

It was the Young Men's Association of Plymouth Church that invited Abraham Lincoln to deliver an address in New York in 1860. Originally the address was to be given at the church, but at the request of the Young Republicans of New York, the site was transferred to the Great Hall of Cooper Union. In his speech Lincoln first set forth his position on slavery. The day before the speech he attended services at the church, sitting in Pew 89, now marked by a silver plaque.

After the Civil War Beecher continued to espouse liberal social causes. He was a proponent of women's rights, serving as president of the American Suffrage Society. He also embraced and popularized the theory of evolution. He was an early advocate of Jewish-Christian dialogue as well.

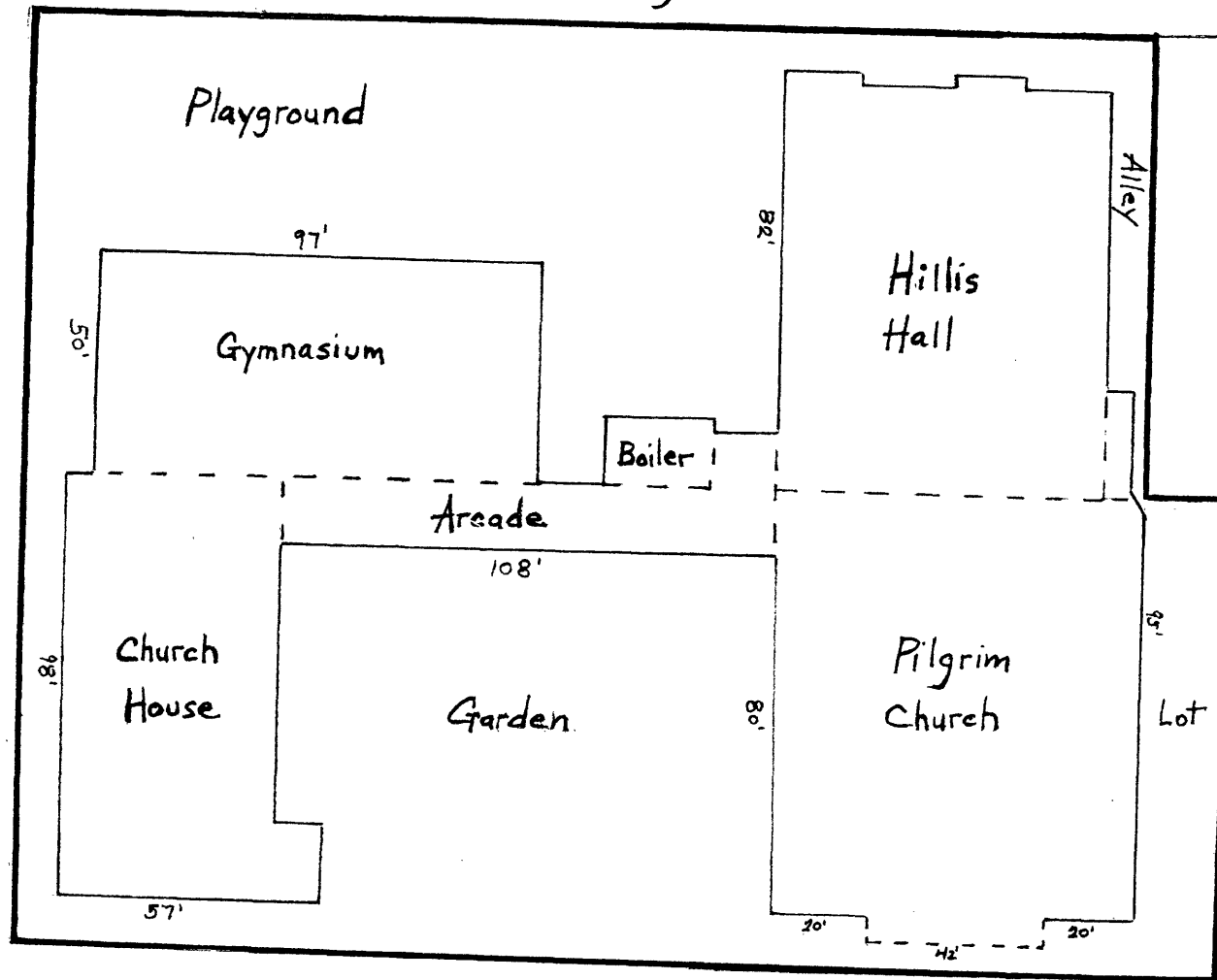
In addition to his preaching, Beecher was well known as a literary figure. He became editor of The Independent in 1861 and the Christian Union in 1870. His major publications include The Life of Jesus, the Christ (1871) and Evolution and Religion (1885).

Other notable speakers have addressed the congregation, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Charles Dickens, William M. Thackeray, Mark Twain, Louis Kossuth, Clara Barton, Booker T. Washington, and Martin Luther King.

Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims
Brooklyn, New York

Cranberry Street

Hicks Street



Orange Street

N ↑

Site Plan based on
GAB
Value Appraisal Services